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Guidance Position Statement

Public Works Infrastructure Asset Management

Statement of Purpose

APWA seeks to inform elected officials, public administrators, public works managers and staff, and the public at large regarding the scope and significance of the public's investment in public works infrastructure and, through public policy, education, and advocacy, to accelerate widespread adoption of infrastructure asset management principles and practices.

Statement of Position

The American Public Works Association is committed to the principle that public works facilities and their management organizations are valuable assets and should be managed to provide the highest possible return on the public's investment.

Reliable public works services are crucial to a safe, healthful, and productive civil society. Each generation inherits the complex system of infrastructure that facilitates these services, develops and operates this system to meet our current demands and aspirations, and then passes the system on as a legacy to future generations. These valuable assets—sewers, water supply, streets, storm-water facilities, parks, waste management systems, public buildings, and the like—should be managed to get the highest possible return for the public. APWA works to develop and encourage the application of the philosophy, principles, and practical tools of public works infrastructure asset management.

Infrastructure asset management involves day-to-day operations and maintenance as well as strategic planning and budgeting. What distinguishes asset management practices is an explicit recognition that benefits and services as well as costs are being managed. This recognition is reflected in the fundamental operational objective of infrastructure asset management, to provide defined services efficiently. The members of the community served must define the services they want, now and in the future; understanding that the diverse costs of these services will be incurred now and in the future as well. They must recognize that when resources are constrained, services may be reduced.

Background and Rationale

Public works infrastructure asset management refers to the activities of deciding how to develop, operate, and maintain our infrastructure to achieve the greatest possible economic, environmental, and social benefits from the public's investment of tax money, land, and other resources that go into building, operating and delivering public works services, now and in the future. As responsible officials, as engaged professionals, and as citizens we are all owners and beneficiaries of this investment; we share a responsibility to use these assets wisely, to conserve and enhance their value.

Two broad forces underlie the emergence of public works infrastructure asset management philosophy and practices. First, new technologies are enabling infrastructure managers to measure and control infrastructure's benefits and costs with greater precision, reliability, and understanding of the uncertainties associated with the job. Second, our modern society has come increasingly to appreciate and expect consideration of environmental and social consequences of our actions.

APWA has for several years worked to develop infrastructure asset management principles and practices without formally stating the association's position on their importance. During this time, for example, APWA has produced video workshops and guidance manuals on the subject, advised other organizations such as the General Accounting Office and the Government Accounting Standards Board, participated with other organizations in national conferences, and informed growing numbers of attendees at APWA national and regional congresses. Building on the past, this position statement will provide a strong focus for APWA's future activities, as part of the association's strategic planning and branding efforts, and for APWA's influence as a spokesperson for public works infrastructure in public-policy forums.

Sponsor and date of proposal Leadership and Management Committee (drafted by Andrew Lemer and revised in committee conference calls); October 10, 2003.